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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses some of the concerns inherent in evaluating feminists' projects and focuses on three topics: (1) a discussion of some objections raised by feminists about traditional forms of assessment; (2) a description of the strengths and weaknesses of illuminative evaluation as an alternative approach to evaluate feminist programs; and (3) an introduction of a new model of evaluation which is termed "collaborative evaluation." Objections to traditional forms of assessment for women's studies programs or curriculum balancing projects include questioning the appropriateness of masculine models and criticizing the traditional split between participants and evaluators. Illuminative evaluation encompasses traditional experimental and psychometric practices, as well as phenomonological and ethnographic modes, and has been proposed to evaluate innovative projects. While this approach has been suitable in the evaluation of some women's programs, data collection instruments did not always elicit input from all appropriate participants. Evaluators were often knowledgeable insiders; they found it increasingly difficult to perform as independent outsiders. A recent evaluation of a women's studies program illustrates the use of the collaborative evaluation model. Collaborative evaluation permits evaluators of feminist projects to address the conflicting roles that they assume as impartial outsiders and as knowledgeable insiders. (GDC)

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Collaborative Evaluation:
Towards a Transformation of Evaluation
for Feminist Programs and Projects

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Introduction

There are considerable problems inherent in evaluating Women's Studies programs or curriculum balancing projects. The approach utilized must address both the innovative, interdisciplinary nature of these programs, as well as their long-range implications. It must also take into account the highly participatory nature of these projects. In the past, those who evaluated such programs and projects tended to utilize conventional measuring instruments. The advantage of using these instruments has been that they were "tried and true" and often acceptable to those to whom Women's Studies was accountable -- i.e., university administrators, funding agencies. However, this begs the following series of questions: Tried and true on what? -- Were these instruments determined effective when used only on traditional departments and programs within the institution? Could these instruments really assess the very special non-traditional nature of Women's Studies programs and projects? Were the questions asked appropriate to the intent of many projects -- projects whose goals often consisted of breaking down the barriers between the disciplines and of challenging the traditional curriculum of the Academy? Did these instruments, whether they were attitudinal surveys, developmental stage measures, pre- and post tests determine subtle and not so subtle goals of the directors and faculty of Women's Studies programs? Did psychological measurement instruments assess the participatory

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interactions between the director and participants or between the faculty and students of these programs and projects? Did they measure the intended and unintended consequences of an innovative proposal? Did they take into account the long-range implications of a new project? Were the techniques sufficiently eclectic to measure all that the project and program director hoped to accomplish? Were these instruments sufficiently flexible for the varied features of a particular campus?

The questions listed above are just some that should be considered when evaluating a feminist program or project. Numerous critics of traditional evaluative instruments and methodologies have asked similar questions and have discussed the need for non-traditional assessment techniques (Bowles and Duelli-Klein, 1983; Cook, 1984; Duelli-Klein, 1980; Eichler, 1980; Harding and Hintikka, 1983; Nebraska Sociological Feminist Collective, 1983; Oakley, 1981; Roberts, 1981; Stanley and Wise, 1983; and Westkott, 1979).

This paper addresses some of the concerns inherent in evaluating feminists projects and focuses on three topics. These are: first, a discussion of some objections raised by feminists about traditional forms of assessment; second, a description of the strengths and weaknesses of illuminative evaluation as an alternative approach to evaluate feminist programs; and finally, an introduction of a new model of evaluation which is herein termed as "collaborative evaluation." This hybrid evaluation will be introduced by the author as an approach not only compatible with feminist theory and practice, but also very appropriate for the assessment of Women's Studies programs and curriculum balancing projects.

Traditional Evaluation: Some Criticisms Raised by Feminists

Feminist scholars have criticized an axiom in research and evaluation "that the choice of a problem is determined by method instead of a method being determined by the problem" (Daly, 1973). In particular, when this unstated but traditional emphasis on the method, rather than on the program or subjects being studied, has been applied to feminist projects, the investigations have ended up being *on* women and not *for* women (Duelli-Klein, 1980). Indeed, the accepted, male-dominated view of research and evaluation has led Westkott (1979) and Eichler (1980) to find fault with traditional investigations for the types of questions asked, the techniques used, and the conclusions drawn. McCormack (1982) also focused on methodology when she asked:

> "Does the method itself contain within it protocols which preclude the full participation of women or the kind of participation in which women excel? -- Can it be said that the real meaning of the phrase 'prediction and control' is a male desire to dominate, to exert power over people as well as nature, an exercise in masculinity? Does the scientific method replace one form of male mystification - theology and metaphysics - with another? And by perpetuating the method, by conforming to its rules, do women, thereby, insure a future of male hegemony in intellectual life, in institutional arrangements, and in our own minds?" (3).

The masculine model was further criticized by the Nebraska Feminist Collective (1983) when they questioned the continued use of a patriarchal discipline on feminist subjects. To them, there is a need for a feminist ethics which recognized the oppression of women in research, work and social structures through the traditional and constant utilization of a patriarchal discipline. The Collective expressed dissatisfaction with the continued use of women as research objects. Harding and Hintikka (1983) also presented an effective critical appraisal of the "distinctively

masculine perspectives on masculine experience" and identified in their book "distinctive aspects of women's experience which can provide resources for the construction of more representatively human understanding" (x). Stanley and Wise's (1983) critique indicated the need of a "feminist social science" where personal and direct experiences were recognized. Criticisms of this nature emphasized the very real importance of developing new or modifying old methodologies, especially for studies within a feminist context.

Beyond raising ethical questions about research and evaluative methodologies, feminists have criticized the traditional object/subject split between "the evaluator" and "those being assessed." Duelli-Klein doubted whether the detached and neutral outside evaluator was acceptable to those involved in feminist projects, since their settings are usually highly participatory and democratic. Oakley (1981) and Bristow and Esper(1984) too raised objections to the one-way process in traditional interviewing and the need to be uninvolved. They wrote about a two-way dialogue between interviewer and interviewee and believed it was the way for theory and practice to meld to elicit personal responses to women's experiences. In predominately female settings, personal responses, as well as factual knowledge, were often discussed and valued. The traditional remoteness and lack of involvement of the evaluator appeared to be in conflict with the high level of commitment and the willingness to share personal experiences of those participating in the project. Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) described the concept of objectivity in the following way:

> "A feminist methodology must, therefore, deal with the issues of objectivity in social science and, in the process, deal also with the issue of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. As researchers, we must not impose our definitions of reality on those researched, for to do so would undermine our intention to work toward a sociology for women. Our intention is to minimize the tendency in all research to transform those researched into objects of scrutiny and manipulation" (425).

In addition, the removed, "objective" evaluator, who lacks understanding and empathy for the social change goals inherent in most feminist projects, is likely to carry an unintentional bias into the evaluation. Passivity and neutrality can hinder the development of rapport between the researcher and those in the program being studied. The lack of awareness of a researcher's own biases can create unintentionally a priviledged situation between researcher and researched. In fact, most feminists seemed not to expect an evaluator to approach a new project free of perconceived ideas. They did not want the total absence of perspective and bias, which is an underlying assumption of most traditional methodologies. Instead, most welcomed explicit acknowledgement of points of view. The term "conscious subjectivity" (Coyner, 1980) was introduced to name a process which permits different perspectives to be presented and acknowledges that researchers and evaluators may also speak.

Thus, feminists have criticized the traditional research and evaluative methods, the object/subject split, and the neutrality of the evaluator. To many feminists, acceptance of male research and evaluative models is not the answer. Instead, they are in search of alternative evaluative models that are theoretically and methodologically appropriate to feminist projects.

Illuminative Evaluation

Illuminative evaluation is an example of a non-traditional evaluative approach that has been used to measure the success and failure of innovative projects (Parlett and Dearden, 1977). This form of evaluation is not strictly part of the experimental and psychometric tradition, for it encompasses the phenomonological and ethnographic mode as well. It is so broad-based that it utilizes not only the techniques of participant observation, interviews, and analysis of documents, in the form of a case study, but where appropriate it also incorporates questionnaires and other quantifiable instruments. The advantage of illuminative evaluation is that both qualitative and quantitive methods can be combined "to illuminate the subject" (Parlett and Hamilton, 1978).

As a strategy, illuminative evaluation makes no claims to perfect objectivity. It is not expected that an evaluator is value free; thus, the duality of the evaluator's role of independent outsider and often knowledgeable insider is accepted. Additionally, change is considered to be a natural part of any innovative project and intervention of the evaluator in the change process is acknowledged. Illuminative evaluation is also a form of assessment that could be called goal-free (Millsap, Bagenstos and Talburtt, 1979; Parlett and Dearden, 1977; Scriven, 1977). Thus, this methodology can be used to record not only the intended but also the unintended consequences of a program or project (Shapiro, Secor and Butchart, 1981); and it is particularly useful for new programs when long-term effects cannot be foreseen.

From a practical viewpoint, this evaluator and her colleagues found

illuminative evaluation to be an especially effective means to measure complex, innovative feminist projects. Indeed, we have used this evaluative modality to measure a Women's Studies project which was varied and change-oriented (Shapiro, Secor and Butchart, 1981), as well as to examine the participatory process for developing a questionnaire appropriate to measure changes in a feminist context (Shapiro and Reed, 1984).

While illuminative evaluation is clearly of considerable value for the assessment of women's programs, the model itself has not been critiqued. One objective of this paper is to consider the strengths and weaknesses of illuminative evaluation in relationship to the assessment of complex feminist programs and projects at a particular site over time. In the next section of the paper, data from recent and past reviews of Women's Studies programs, projects and institutes, conducted by the author, will be used to illustrate the different ways illuminative evaluation can assess complex innovative projects.

Application of Illuminative Evaluation to Feminist Projects

Because of its emphasis on change and flexibility in using diverse instruments and approaches, illuminative evaluation seemed very appropriate for innovative program assessment (Shapiro, Butchart and Secor, 1981). My colleagues and I found it exceedingly effective in the assessment of The Next Move, a project to assist women working in higher education to move up the hierarchy of the Academy.[1] Illuminative evaluation, with the combination of questionnaire data, observations and interviews, offered the program director and staff the kinds of insights

and perspectives necessary to begin to understand the change process of a complex project. The diverse measures enabled program planners to glean strengths and weaknesses as the project moved from one university campus to another. The assessment enabled the planners to make changes to strengthen the outcome of the projects as it moved from site to site.

Illuminative evaluation was especially effective in The Next Move for dealing with unintended consequences. Follow-up interviews provided a rich source of data. The interviews were not part of the original assessment design -- but because of the flexibility of illuminative evaluation and its goal-free form, it was acceptable to add the follow-up interviews. One major unanticipated consequence was the high mobility rate of participants in the program in such a short period of time. Within ten months of the program's introduction, 20% of the 105 original participants reported positive career changes, i.e., new and expanded responsibilities, new titles, different posts, nonscheduled salary increases. Neither the program developers nor the evaluator expected such rapid change.

Illuminative evaluation proved effective when used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of two Women's Studies summer institutes [2]. Theoretically, this approach worked well and enabled the evaluator to modify the assessment design and to work closely with participants and program developers alike (Shapiro and Reed, 1984, 1987). Intervention was seen as appropriate in illuminative evaluation. A combination of participant-observations, textual analysis, questionnaires and interviews were used for the assessment procedure. The evaluator had to be responsive to the needs of the participants and organizers alike, and illuminative evaluation allowed for that flexibility. The eclectic design

of the assessment enabled the sponsoring agencies to receive the kind of reports that were appropriate for them -- i.e., percentages, questionnaire responses; while the program planners could receive more of a narrative evaluation of the project. In fact, the final report had "something for everyone," and what was appropriate could be extracted from the report for the needs of selected individuals or groups.

Feminist Criticisms of Illuminative Evaluation

Despite the flexibility, diversity and goal-free aspect of illuminative evaluation, over the years, there have been some drawbacks to this assessment technique. While it is one of the most flexible of the approaches available to evaluators, certain premises on which it was developed may be inappropriate and result in difficulties for the assessment of feminist projects over time.

One problem resided with the evaluator's role in illuminative evaluation: the role of independent outsider and at the same time knowledgeable insider. This duality can result in practical problems caused when applied to a feminist setting. For example, in the Great Lakes Colleges summer institutes, the program developers from the outset envisioned a collaborative process. In the initial proposal to the Lilly foundation, the assessor was called an evalution consultant, not an evaluator. Clearly, in mind, there was a wish to hire someone sympathetic to the project who could provide expertise as well as have a real understanding of a feminist institute. No outside, impartial evaluator would do. Continuous collaborations were expected and were carried out throughout the evaluative process-- in developing the questionnaire, in

determining whom to interview, and in deciding what kind of reports to submit.

In the case of developing a questionnaire, collaboration was expected in this feminist context. In the past, as an evaluator, I was cognizant of the difficulties that were inherent in questionnaire design and implementation. However, at the Great Lakes Colleges institutes, I was astonished to find how effective the collaborative process could be in developing an instrument with meaningful, site-specific questions. Indeed, many of the partcipants who were involved in designing the questionnaire experessed "good feelings." Only those who had not been contacted for their suggestions indicated annoyance with the instrument. In fact, one of the critics of the first institute's instruments was Renate Duelli-Klein, an evaluator in her own right. In a lengthy letter she spoke of the need to perform evaluations which would be of help <u>to</u> women not just focus <u>on</u> women. Her letter added to my conviction that there was a need to constantly interact with <u>all</u> participants and staff alike and heed their advice. While the evaluator's intervention in the project was expected in illuminative evaluation, nowhere was such a highly participatory involvement described.

Although illuminative evaluation offered the evaluator the ability to choose appropriate techniques, there was an expectation that standard sampling methods would be used. For the interview component of the process, as time and money were constraints, it seemed correct to turn to conventional sampling methods to select participants for this aspect of

the evaluative process. As an impartial outsider, I thought it appropriate to select interviewees not as population variables, but as representatives based on race, class, age, ethnicity, and discipline. However, participants in the GLCA Summer Institutes prompted fuller reconsideration of criteria associated with selecting interviewees.

At the Institute, Wilma Scott Heide [3] challenged the seeming unbiased, technically sound selection process by openly stating that she would like to be interviewed. She responded to the answer that she was not on my list by asking, "And who is on your list?" I went over my list of interviews indicating the sociological breakdown and variables used. Her response was, "Well, then, what about years of activism in the movement? What of sexual preference? What of Women's Studies faculty as opposed to faculty from diverse disicplines? What of the "tokens"? Intrigued by her answer, I agreed to interview her. Her inside knowledge, and experience offered another layer of information that would not have been forthcoming from other participants and it provided me with the insight that not to interview this special individual would have meant a loss of information.

To summarize, while offering a broad approach for assessing innovative projects, illuminative evaluation still had inherent problems associated with its use in feminist contexts. Three problems continued to cause the evaluator significant difficulties. Firstly, the duality of the evaluator's role as both independent outsider and knowledgeable insider was fraught with problems. In a feminist setting, it became harder and harder to put on the facade of independent outsider. Secondly it became

more and more difficult to ignore all the voices of those participating in the projects and programs -- especially of those who wished to participate. Thirdly, the subject/object split became a very real issue for this evaluator. Sampling sizes -- however large -- were not appropriate for this context as this type of approach tended to objectify participants rather than include them as valued human beings. It was clear to me the more I assessed feminist projects that the process must be a collaborative endeavor where the voices of all those who wished to speak could be heard.

Beyond Illuminative Evaluation -- Towards Collaborative Evaluation

> "In the ideal case, we want to create conditions in which the object of research enters into the process as an active subject" (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1983, 425).

My most recent evaluation of a Women's Studies Program focused my attention on many of the conflicts that exist when the evaluator assumes the dual role of outside neutral evaluator and inside knowledgeable person in a feminist context. From the perspective of an administrator of a Women's Studies Program, it was clear to me that the institution knew it was not hiring an independent neutral outsider. With this tacit understanding, the role of the evaluator was to view the strengths and weaknesses of the program, to sympathetically suggest ways to strengthen this program, and to write up those ideas as a set of recommendations for the institution's administration.

Based on the experiences gained from the Great Lakes Summer Institutes, interviews were conducted with individuals who expressed a need to be questionned. Additionally, a slot was provided for an "open

time" that could be used for unsolicited discussions with faculty and students. The unexpected occurred in this free time slot, when a male faculty member, unknown to the Women's Studies program administrators, offered a precedent in the institution which could be of great use to the Women's Studies Program. "Open time" encouraged a faculty member to indicate his support of Women's Studies, and it provided a formal structure to enable him to offer advice and encouragement.

The qualitative methods of participant observation, textual analysis, and interviews provided most of the information for the final report. Conventional assessments such as enrollment figures and other quantitative measures were also included in the report. Above all, the voices of those who wished to be part of the evaluative process were expressed through the pages either in the forms of direct quotations or in summary statements. Recommendations and judgements in this report were framed as follows:

> "Below is a list of recommendations for the University of X's Women's Studies Program. Whenever possible, these recommendations were derived from a consensus of interviewees' opinions. If not a consensus, then the recommendations emanated from a group or groups of respondents. Throughout, if appropriate, those who favored each recommendation will be presented. Additionally, the evaluator's own suggestions will be stated."

The overall process, based on admitted bias from the outset, permitted the document to be written in an open and honest fashion without resort to unqualified statements or possible ambiguity where there might have been a clash between feminist ideas and program success. The object/subject split disappeared and for the first time as an evaluator there were no complaints about the assessment procedure. The recommendations were not novel -- they were simply the compiled and prioritized suggestions of

those who cared about Women's Studies; indeed they had been articulated before, but were not really heard. The recommendations themselves were drawn from the voices of all those interviewed. The words of the students, staff and faculty were given legitimacy through the offical pages of the evaluator's report. Changes that were subsequently implemented from the report could not be simply attributed to the report; what was achieved was in large part due to the acceptance of a need for a change by the university administration. But above all, what was accomplished was a collaborative evaluative process which seemed so clear and accurate as it contained the voices of those who were involved and who were concerned about the Women's Studies Program.

Collaborative Evalution and Curriculum Balancing Projects

Quantitative Assessment:

> "There must be appropriate quantitative evidence to counter the pervasive and influential quantitative sexist research which has and continues to be generated in the social sciences. Feminist researchers can best accomplish this" (Jayaratne, 1983, 158-159).

Based on the experiences previously described, illuminative evaluation has undergone further development and was modified to meet the special needs of feminists, and its revised form I've called "collaborative evaluation." The collaborative evaluation concept borrows illuminative evaluation's eclectic approach to information gathering; is well suited for feminist programs; and should be effective in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of curriculum balancing projects. These projects have been recently well described in books by Fritsche (1985), Schmitz (1985) and Spanier (1984). In the gender balancing projects, there is often intentional outreach and in these instances data collection and processing

become major activities. In such cases, quantitative studies, experimental designs, and survey instruments may be useful asessments of a project's successes or failures. For example, to be able to compare information from experimental and control groups might be a helpful modality for assessing curriculum integration projects when exposure to the new scholarship on women is the major variable. These projects often are aimed at determining how this parameter modifies activities and thoughts of selected students and faculty. Collaborative evaluation would permit assessment of these experimental protocols. It should be noted that the nub of this model is that it requires the evaluator with students and faculty to develop new survey instruments. Tried and true instruments would have to be reassessed. Attitudinal scales and questionnaires, despite their seeming precision, would not necessarily be reliable or acceptable in feminist settings. The types of questions asked and the attitudes measured would have to reflect subtleties and complexities not hitherto considered in conventional measuring instruments and they would have to reflect the nuances of the institutions. As was discussed earlier, questions framed and scales designed with the help of faculty and students involved in the project would begin to tap the more subtle changes over time which affect those who teach and those who learn the new scholarship on women. Additionally, the process itself would be a learning one for all those involved -- including the evaluator.

Qualitative Assessment

> "Qualitative data - whatever method is used - do convey a deeper feeling for or more emotional closeness to the persons studied. A detailed account of an individual's struggle against oppression is more emotionally touching than a research report giving statistical evidence of the struggle of a group of individuals" (Jayaratne, 1983, 145).

Outcomes from diverse curriculum balancing projects often initiate subtle changes which may be very difficult to detect. McIntosh and Minnich (1984) wrote about the scope, diversity and complexity of these projects in the following way:

> "Most projects in curriculum change involve changing faculty members themselves, through workshops, seminars, team-teaching assignments, colloquia, conferences, and other forms of collegial work. Some curriculum change projects do not center directly on faculty reeducation but instead involve creation of new curricular materials, or materials for doing a reassessment and critique of courses in the traditional curriculum" (140).

To tap the subtleties of these types of projects, qualitative as well as quantitative approaches would be exceedingly valuable. One method which needs to be considered is the use of ethnographic approaches. In many ways, the techniques of ethnography are well suited to describing what is happening in an integration project. Through the use of interviews, observations and textual analysis and with the help of key informants, an evaluator can learn overt as well as subtle changes in a society or a group. However, a true ethnography requires so much time on a site and hence money to carry out the process that it could be placed outside the fiscal and time-dependent needs of most institutions. Thus, it is doubtful if the pure form of this approach could be used frequently in determining the success or failure for most integration projects. A final drawback to the use of ethnographic techniques is that most ethnographers are trained to describe and interpret, but not judge. This restriction on making judgements does limit the ways ethnographers use in reporting back to institutions and funding agencies.

Wolcott (1983) explained the difficulties of combining ethnography with evaluation when he wrote:

> "That potential is to recognize that ethnography can serve as an alternative to rather than merely as an alternative form of evaluation. Ethnography viewed as an alternative to evaluation suggests a descriptive and interpretive activity whose purposes are to understand rather than to judge and to examine facets of human behavior as part of larger cultural systems" (178-179).

Fetterman (1984) stated the problem of doing an ethnographic evaluation in another way:

> "First, ethnographic evaluations are ultimately evaluations, not ethnographies. These studies begin with the aim of ethnography - to understand. However, they make the next logical step - to asess what is understood" (13).

An alternative to the ethnographic method for working with descriptive data is the case study approach which has much to recommend it. Less restrictive in its requirements than the pure ethnographic method, case study enables an evaluator to describe a setting, over a short period of time, and also allows for judgements at the end of the assessment period. Although some case study workers would have the data speak for itself (MacDonald and Walker, 1977; Simons, 1980), others are less reluctant to allow the voice of the case study worker to be heard.

However, while the techniques involved in ethnographic and case study approaches would be useful constituents of the collaborative evaluation process, they both do not necessarily include the voices of all those who believe they have something to say about the project. Key informants alone would not suffice; neither would a sampling of subjects for structured and unstructured interviews. For the collaborative evaluator, the voices of the very articulate as well as the habitually silent must be

heard; opinions from the powerful as well as the powerless must be solicited.

Conclusion

In summary, curriculum integration projects and Women's Studies programs need appropriate assessment techniques. In particular, since many feminist projects and programs' goals are to ultimately transform the curriculum of educational institutions, it is important to develop new assessment approaches to measure the transformation process. This paper considers the importance of illuminative evaluation as an assessment approach and describes a new model of measurement called collaborative evaluation. This model can be used in assessing eclectic projects and is interactive; as such it should be of use in the evaluation of complex social and curriculum change projects. The technique is well suited for measurements of subtle and yet not so subtle changes. Collaborative evaluation permits evaluators of feminist projects to address the conflicting roles that they assume as impartial outsiders and as knowledgeable insiders. By admitting a bias in support of a project, the evaluator can develop a level of trust that will permit the voices of the marginal and the powerless to be heard.

Footnotes

1. The Next Move was designed and conducted by Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Mid-Atlantic and funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE).

2. The two Women's Studies summer institutes were developed by the Great Lakes Colleges Association and were funded by Lilly Endowments. They were held on the University of Michigan Campus.

3. Wilma Scott Heide was a feminist leader. She was the first president of NOW and was an activist for women's rights throughout her life.

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